

## HEALTH DEPARTMENT & BOARD OF HEALTH

Fiscal Year 2005

The mission of the Amherst Board of Health, working through the Health Department, is to promote the health and wellbeing of our community. We fulfill this mission through our core functions: assessment, assurance, promotion, and policy development.

**Assurance:** ensuring that all Amherst residents have the services necessary to maintain or restore good health either by coordinating the delivery of services by other agencies, by policy or regulation development, or by providing services directly

**Assessment:** systematically collecting, assembling, analyzing, and making available information regarding the health of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs, and epidemiological studies of health problems

**Promotion:** providing services and educational opportunities that encourage healthy environments and healthy lifestyles

**Policy Development:** development and implementation of comprehensive public health policies, regulations and legislation.

The work of the Amherst Health Department is organized into six major areas: Access to Health Care, Infectious Disease Control, Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Environmental Health, Health Policy and Planning and Emergency Preparedness.

### I. Access to Health Care

Ensuring access to health care for all Amherst residents continues to be a priority for the Department. Some of the Departmental programs to address these concerns are: Hampshire Health Connect, "Peace in the Family: a Khmer Community Project," the Nursing Center, and the Convalescent Equipment Loan Program. Due to budget cuts, the Health Department was not able to provide significant services to the newcomer Latino community during this year. We hope to find a way to reinstate these services.

#### **Hampshire Health Connect**

Hampshire Health Connect (HHC) is a nonprofit organization created by a group of citizens, providers and representatives of local government, businesses, and the insurers. Its aim is to link families and individuals who are underinsured or who have no health insurance with insurance programs that they may be eligible for or to medical providers willing to see HHC patients at no charge or on a sliding fee scale. HHC is housed in Cooley Dickinson Hospital. The Health Director, Epi Bodhi, is currently secretary of the Board of Directors of HHC.

Thanks to several grants, HHC was able to engage the services of a Latina caseworker, who has been working out of the Amherst Health Department to enroll all Amherst residents, but especially those whose first language is Spanish, in the program. As a result of this, Amherst residents' participation in HHC rose by 70 % and the number of Latino clients served by HHC increased by 25%.

This past year, membership in the physician network rose by 56%.

### **Cambodian Health**

The Cambodian outreach worker position was fully funded this past fiscal year. The Cambodian community, especially its elderly members, has been relieved to see its return. Outreach Worker Lauren Srey continues to provide services and advocate for the Cambodian community. For example, she continues to work with Khmer Health Advocates to provide medical and mental health services for Cambodians. She has also worked with many of the elders to help them become United States citizens.

Lauren Srey helps residents in many ways. Here are some of them:

34	citizenship and immigration issues
156	medical assistance
17	home visits
6	domestic violence cases
27	housing issues
9	court issues
29	mediation assistance cases in local schools

### **Nursing Center Services**

This year, the Nursing Center for Amherst's senior citizens became part of the Health Department. The office operates 8 hours per week and is open for appointments and walk-ins. Cheryl Smith, certified nurse practitioner, provided services to 294 individuals this past year. In fulfilling the mission of "*Helping Seniors Help Themselves Stay Healthy*," the Nursing Center delivers sound preventive healthcare services that are usually not covered by Medicare or other insurers. The purpose is to provide individualized health assessment and education, and counseling which incorporates prescribed treatment goals. Each individual served is viewed as an active participant in the health care process, and focus is on the individual's potential. Services include monitoring the effects of medications and treatments, simple first aid procedures, appropriate health care referrals, and individual and group education for various conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and musculoskeletal disorders.

### **Convalescent Equipment Lending Program**

Kathryn Drake, Health Department Office Administrator, receives convalescent equipment such as walkers, commodes, shower benches, tub safety rails, canes, crutches, and a limited number of wheelchairs, through donations and maintains a loan closet for citizens in need. Ninety-two Amherst residents borrowed one hundred pieces of convalescent equipment during FY 05.

## **II. Infectious Disease Control**

Controlling the spread of communicable diseases and food-borne illnesses is an important function of the Health Department.

Infectious Disease Surveillance and Control during FY 05 included the following:

- one case of active Tuberculosis
- nine cases of Tb prevention and control
- 14,132 doses of vaccine distributed to eleven Amherst providers
- three flu clinics, in conjunction with the Council on Aging, provided vaccines for flu and tetanus to 334 residents
- monthly immunization clinics provided 212 immunizations to adults and children
- 9 cases of Salmonella 5 cases of Giardia, 5 cases of Campylobacter, 3 cases of Chickenpox, 11 cases of Pertussis, 1 case of Hepatitis A, 2 cases of hepatitis B, 3 cases of Hepatitis C, 21 cases of Lyme Disease, 2 cases of Cryptosporidiosis, 2 cases of e coli, 2 cases of Malaria, 1 case of Babesiosis.

### **III. Disease Prevention and Health Promotion**

Programs aimed at promoting health and preventing disease are another important aspect of the Health Department's work. Programs and interventions are either for the general public or are targeted to certain groups that are at increased health risk because of their membership in a particular demographic group, or as consequences of their own behavior or the behavior of others.

#### **High risk groups**

- The Public Health Nurse and Inspectors work together in a team approach to address the multi-faceted problem of hoarding, via joint inspections that include mental health assessments and referrals to social services.
- The Health Director and Public Health Nurse have begun work with the Council on Aging to ensure that seniors are offered high-quality nursing services.
- Emergency planning and bioterrorism response planning continues at the Town, state and county level.
- Town of Amherst Handicapped Permits are available to residents of Amherst who have a temporary or chronic condition that substantially limits their mobility. This permit allows residents to park in handicapped spaces within the Town of Amherst. This permit WILL NOT extend any privileges beyond Town limits, or to the area colleges. A permit may be obtained from the Amherst Health Department. A doctor's certificate stating the condition and the expected duration of the disability is required.

#### **Alcohol and Substance Abuse Education**

The Health Director continues to be active in several Town, University, and School efforts to examine alcohol abuse, underage drinking, and substance abuse. Results of a High School survey of students' abuse of alcohol and drugs revealed a serious situation. The Amherst Board of Health received a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in 1999 to help address this problem of substance abuse in the High School. This enabled us to hire a Health Educator, Kathy Wicks, to help coordinate the work of the Amherst Drug Free Community Partnership. The OJJDP grant is in its fourth year of funding. Work to develop and maintain a secure organizational structure and build stronger relationships among the key players continues. The Partnership continues to support existing local youth programs, pilot new programs,

and develop messages that discourage alcohol and other drug use among youth in Amherst. The focus of this next year will be to research and select a science-based tool to assess the current status of youth risk and protective factors.

Programs targeting youth that the Partnership funded included, for the third year in a row, the Challenge Day Program for 200 youth and 40 adults. This program is designed to engage youth in an interactive process where youth challenge themselves to understand different forms of oppression that are often the basis of behavior affecting the social climate (such as violence, drug and alcohol use, truancy, bullying, etc.). This program is an integral part of the school district's effort to improve the climate of the school. The Partnership was also involved in two of the Challenge Day follow-up events, a lunch and social where students were "challenged" to mix and sit with students according to their birth month. The program and the follow-up events were considered a huge success by the students, the school administration, parents, and other community participants. The Partnership also supported a peer social-marketing campaign targeting risk-taking youth. Parents are another target audience in the effort to reduce substance and alcohol use. This year, the Partnership was actively involved in working with the High School and the High School Parent Center to involve parents in sharing strong non-use messages with their teens. Using data from the parent survey conducted last year, social-norms media-marketing campaign posters and brochures were created and launched through local and school events. Social-norms marketing is a cutting-edge public health strategy that challenges misperceptions about behavior and replaces it with actual data, so that healthy behavior ultimately becomes the uncontested norm. The Partnership also helped plan and supported the second annual Amherst Regional High School Parent Conference. This is an all-day event that provides opportunities for all High School parents to engage with the school through workshops, presentations, class observation, social time, and student performances.

The youth health survey, done in collaboration with the Safe School Initiative, was last administered in the spring of 2005. This data will be used to monitor our progress towards eliminating substance abuse among youth. We will also use the information in our social-norms marketing campaign to challenge the misperceptions around the use of alcohol and other drugs among youth. The parent survey will be administered for the second time during the 2005-06 school year to gauge our progress regarding the current social-norms media marketing campaign and will also provide new material.

#### **IV. Environmental Issues**

The Board of Health is required by state statute and regulations to perform many important and crucial duties relating to the protection of public health, disease control and the promotion of sanitary living conditions. On behalf of the Board of Health, Environmental Health Services staff conducted 1,309 inspections and issued 405 permits.

##### **Food Safety**

The Health Department issues food permits for all food service establishments, including restaurants and food service facilities in stores, recreational camps, bed and breakfasts, colleges, hotels, motels, retail food stores, schools and mobile food units.

We enforce Chapter X of the State Sanitary Code: Minimum Standard for Food

Establishments, 105 CMR 590.000. This code, along with the Federal Food Code, allows us to conduct inspections, issue orders and suspend or revoke permits where necessary.

The Health Department inspects 208 food handlers in Amherst. These include temporary events, mobile, retail, bakery and catering establishments. Since the state's adoption of the 1999 Federal Food Code, the Health Department has worked to help local restaurants comply. The code requires that all restaurants have a person in charge (PIC) who has knowledge of food-borne disease prevention and application of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles. This year will include continued monitoring of food managers to ensure that they obtain Food Manager Certification and to develop a food protection program in several languages.

### **Body Art Establishments**

The Board of Health and staff researched and collaborated with other states and agencies to update and revise the Body Art Regulations. Assessment and monitoring of these establishments is ongoing.

### **Recreational Camps**

Once again, the number of recreational camps in the Town has increased, along with the number of children attending these camps. The Health Department continues to distribute informational packets and to inspect all camps.

### **Housing**

The Health Department is working to ensure that all the residents are provided with safe, high-quality housing. Under the guidance of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, there is a committee reviewing the Housing Code Regulations. In FY 05, 123 housing inspections were conducted.

### **Precautionary Principle**

The Health Director continues to be actively involved in a statewide coalition to apply the Precautionary Principle, which states:

“When an activity raises the threat of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not established scientifically.”

### **West Nile Virus**

The Department continues to educate residents about measures to prevent becoming infected with West Nile Virus (WNV). In FY 05, 2 dead birds were reported for monitoring purposes to the Health Department; neither of the birds was submitted for testing.

### **Environmental Management System**

A unique spring cleaning project was the result of collaboration between the Schools, Health Department, Department of Public Works, and volunteer “mentors” from the Environmental Health and Safety Departments at UMass and Amherst College. Funded through a Department of Environmental Protection grant that focused on Environmental Management Systems (EMS), Health Department staff members have been working with the Middle School to look at three main aspects of environmental management: chemical

procurement and inventory, safe storage, and disposal of waste. In June 2005, two truck loads of containers, ranging from paints and epoxy to gym floor sealer and cleaners, were disposed of through an agreement with the Department of Public Works and the Household Hazardous Waste Day vendor, Onyx.

## **V. Emergency Preparedness**

Josh Shanley, Amherst's Disaster Resource Coordinator, is an active member of the Hampshire Regional Emergency Planning Committee (REPC). This group represents the 21 communities of Hampshire County and the Fire, Police, Community Services, and Public Health Departments, as well as media, Emergency Services, chief elected officials, Public Works, and business and industry within those towns.

The Health Department continues to develop a volunteer medical provider pool through the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Program. There are currently 30 health care providers on the Amherst MRC roster. The Amherst MRC has held monthly training sessions since the fall of 2004. The group is trained in the National Incident Management System (NIMS), Emergency Dispensing Site (EDS) operations, Shelter Operations, and other public health emergency and disaster preparedness-related topics. The group is planning a variety of public health outreach and education projects, including a health fair for senior citizens. The MRC coordinators, Josh Shanley and Kate Kelly, are involved in several local preparedness organizations such as the Hampshire Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coalition, the Metropolitan Medical Response System, and Five College Public Safety Emergency Preparedness. Kate Kelly serves on a national MRC Core Competencies working group. Kate and Josh are currently assisting the University of Massachusetts in developing another MRC, made up of faculty, staff, and students. The UM-MRC will work closely with the Amherst MRC to provide additional resources to the whole community.

The Health Department's MRC was a key partner in planning a regional Emergency Dispensing Site drill that took place on November 13, 2004. Simultaneous dispensing sites in Northampton and Amherst were staffed by personnel from multiple emergency response agencies. Amherst Health Department staff and MRC volunteers staffed the dispensing clinic at the Amherst dispensing site (the Amherst Regional Middle School) and staging area (Amherst High School).

## **VI. Health Policy and Planning**

The Board of Health is responsible for setting policies and creating regulations to protect the health of Amherst residents.

### **Health Planning**

The Health Director is an active member of the Board of Directors of NACCHO (National Association of County and City Health Officials.) She is a member of the Social Justice Committee as well as the Task Force to develop an operational definition of Local Public Health.

The Amherst Health Department was chosen by NACCHO to be one of nine demonstration sites for a strategic planning tool called MAPP (Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnership). This is an opportunity for the Health Department to work with the many institutions throughout Hampshire County that form the public

health system, so that we may better serve the health needs of all residents. To this end, the Health Department worked with the Hampshire County Partnership for Health, the United Way of Hampshire County and the Strategic Planning Initiative for Families and Youth (SPIFFY) to gather information about the health status of residents and the capacity of our public health system to provide essential public health services. The Health Director is a member of a SPIFFY task force using this information to develop a strategic plan.

Amherst was chosen as a site to begin exploring the links between land-use planning and public health. The Director of the Health Department as well as the Planning Director was invited to a conference to begin this link.

The Health Director was asked to represent the Massachusetts Public Health Association as a participant in the Coalition for Local Public Health, a statewide coalition made up of representatives of the five statewide organizations that advocate for local public health. The Coalition works with state officials to ensure that Massachusetts residents receive the best public health services available.

#### **FY 05 Board of Health**

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